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NEWSPAPER

La Dolce Vita for Italian fare

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Risk-notice bill defeat is victory for industry

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Nation's Restaurant News®

The Weekly Newspaper of the Food-Service Industry

Vol. 22, No. 16 | Published every Monday by Lebhar-Friedman Inc.; $3 a copy, $26.50 a year | April 18, 1988

Menu prices creep upward

Big worry: Will consumers balk?

By Peter J. Romeo

Bruised by escalating food and labor costs, a number of restaurants are nudging menu prices upward despite troubling uncertainties about how patrons will react in a time of slow inflation.

"That is a real concern," said Norman Brinker, chairman of Chili's, the dinner house chain about to post new price points for the second time this year.

The price hikes have thus far been moderate, amounting in most instances to between 1 percent and 4 percent. Like Chili's, such chains as McDonald's, Shoney's, Village Inn, and Bakers Square have found those increments to be sufficient in offsetting higher commodity prices and new margin-eating employment regulations.

But many industry experts assert that creeping commodity prices and government-dictated increases in compensation costs will pressure many chains to jack up prices again and perhaps more sharply than they have in years.

"This year may see the larg-

*(See **CHAINS**, page 11)*

MENU PRICES CREEP UPWARD

(Percentage price change, date)

McDonald's	2.53	March
Chili's	1.25	Jan.
Chili's	1.25	April
Village Inn	1.90	Feb.
Bakers Square	1.90	Feb.
Pancho's	10.00	March

Source: *NRN* research

Hudson's rocks 'n' rolls with punches

The '50s-style counter at Hudson's Grill in Ventura, Calif.

By Richard Martin

VENTURA, Calif. — While selling a quick, casual, full-service "flirt with the '50s" ambience, the seven-unit Hudson's Grill burger specialty chain is also offering a lesson in back-to-basics effectiveness and futuristic flexibility.

Largely by narrowing its menu focus, suppressing menu price inflation, and speeding service, the Southern California outfit has boosted sales in its restaurants from 22 percent to 40 percent in the last 18 months, according to Davis Beckham, operations vice

*(See **HUDSON'S**, page 102)*

BK ad blitz bombs

Adtrack: Awareness down

By Marilyn Alva

LINCOLN, Neb. — After Burger King blitzed the television airwaves with expensive new flame-broiling commercials, consumer awareness levels for the hamburger chain's advertising did what they shouldn't have done. They dropped.

NRN Adtrack

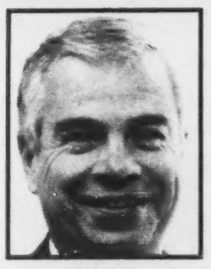
According to the March NRN Adtrack poll, Burger King's advertising awareness level among Americans declined one percentage point at a time when it should have jumped dramatically because of what should have been the dynamics of a fresh new advertising campaign.

New television spots from N.W. Ayer Inc. in New York, with the "We Do It Like You'd Do It" backyard barbecue theme, began airing on network television at the end of February, five months after Burger King announced it would drop longtime ad shop J. Walter Thompson.

The decision to go with a new advertising agency was intended to help bring business back to life at Burger King, where sales have been flat since the mid-1980s.

*(See **BURGER KING**, page 102)*

Doherty named NRN publisher



Doherty

NEW YORK — James C. Doherty, a General Mills retail and food-service executive for 14 years and later chief executive of A & W Restaurants and of Acapulco Restaurants, has been named publisher of Nation's Restaurant News.

"NRN will be enriched under Jim Doherty's leadership," declared J. Roger Friedman, president of parent Lebhar-Friedman Inc. "His wide background in food-service marketing and restaurant operations will further enhance both our editorial and sales staffs."

Reporting to Doherty will be Charles Bernstein, NRN's chief editor, and Martin J. Feldman, national sales manager.

Doherty succeeds Arthur L. Anderman, who now is executive vice president of Cahners Publishing Co.'s new entertainment division (Variety newspapers).

"Nation's Restaurant News is the first-read and the best-read newspaper in the industry," Doherty said. "I

*(See **DOHERTY**, page 102)*

FOOD WATCH

Fit for a king: Urchin roe soufflé

NEW YORK — Sea urchin, hardly a best-selling menu item, was the main ingredient of a frozen dish presented recently at a wine industry promotion at The Pierre Hotel here.

Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten of Restaurant Lafayette at the Drake Hotel prepared a soufflé of sea urchin roe, which was served in the outer shell of the urchin after its needles had been trimmed.

"We're not planning to put it on our regular menu," said Marcel Pitton, food and beverage manager of the Drake Hotel, which owns Restaurant Lafayette. "It has an intense fishy taste, which not all of our customers would like."

This version of a sea urchin roe soufflé was first served in Bangkok for a royal banquet honoring the king of Thailand. Chef Louis Outhier, executive chef of the Drake, and Vongerichten prepared the specialty.

—Karen Bruno

CHARLES BERNSTEIN ON SANITATION RESPONSIBILITIES—PAGE F3

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NEWS DIGEST

Burger King dusts off 'Battle of the Burgers'

MIAMI — Burger King has resurrected its "Battle of the Burgers" advertising strategy in new 30-second television commercials citing taste tests in which the ailing giant's signature Whopper sandwich beat McDonald's Big Mac.

The move comes at a time of turmoil within Burger King's marketing department. In addition, research conducted for Nation's Restaurant News revealed that consumer awareness of Burger King has dropped since the introduction of the chain's new "We do it like you'd do it" advertising campaign.

The "Battle of the Burgers" advertising campaign beefed up Burger King's sales in the early 1980s.

Spurned bidder files suit vs. Shoney's South, TPI

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — A spurned bidder for Shoney's South has filed a lawsuit against the Shoney's franchisee and certain officers for allegedly violating a contract that called for Shoney's South to be sold to the plaintiff, Knoll Capital Management.

Also named as a defendant in the suit, which seeks damages of $3.5 million, is TPI Enterprises, the holding company that has penned an agreement to acquire Shoney's South for $123 million or $18.25 a share.

Knoll alleges that Shoney's South had accepted an unspecified offer from Knoll before entering into the deal with TPI.

Staley Continental braces against Tate & Lyle bid

CHICAGO — Staley Continental, the huge corn syrup sweetener and food-service supplier, was poised last week to resist a takeover bid by British tea and sugar conglomerate Tate & Lyle, which launched a $1 billion-plus offer at $32 a share. The stock immediately climbed toward $40 a share.

"Tate & Lyle is mainly interested in Staley's corn-refining operations and plans to reduce the net cost of the deal by selling off Staley's attractive food-service business," reported Standard & Poor's, the financial services concern. It also suggested that Staley would mount "an aggressive defense."

Tate & Lyle indicated it planned to sell Staley's CFS Continental food-service distribution division. Staley acquired CFS Continental from Alvin and Robert Cohn three and one-half years ago and recently reorganized the executive staff.

Morrison sells distributor subsidiary to PYA|Monarch

MOBILE, Ala. — Morrison Inc., operator of the nation's largest chain of cafeterias, has agreed to sell its Morco Industries distribution division to PYA/Monarch, the food-service distributor owned by Sara Lee.

At the same time Morrison said it entered into a long-term supply agreement with PYA/Monarch. The terms were not disclosed.

"We grew beyond the distribution system currently in place," said a Morrison company spokesman. The company has recently expanded its contract-feeding business westward through the acquisition of Dobbs Food Service Management.

Morco's distribution facilities are located in Tampa, Fla.; Atlanta, Ga.; and Jackson, Miss.

Disney shelves plans for Calif. entertainment area

BURBANK, Calif. — Walt Disney Co. has shelved plans to transform MGM studios here into an entertainment complex featuring themed restaurants, nightclubs, hotels, movie theaters, and retail outlets.

Among the planned food-service facilities was to be a restaurant called the Deep End, which was intended to give patrons the feeling of eating inside a swimming pool, and the Star Quality Diner, which was to showcase 100 years of film history.

Spillman charges Winners with violating state law

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. — Francis Spillman, the restaurant-chain veteran seeking to acquire local fast feeder Winners Corp., has filed a complaint against the restaurant operator for violating a state law by refusing to disclose certain financial information.

The suit came to light in a government document indicating that Spillman had reduced his stake in Winners to 8.8 percent from about 9.7 percent.

The document detailed a legal complaint filed against Winners and certain directors for refusing to grant Spillman's request to review corporate records. Winners, which operates the Mrs. Winner's fast-food chicken chain, had responded by agreeing to provide the minutes of shareholders' meetings.

Spillman said Winners' refusal to provide additional information violated the Tennessee Business Corporation Act.

San Simeon operators plan to open Italian unit in NY

NEW YORK — The operators of San Simeon restaurant, a leading contender in Dallas' fine-dining market, are preparing to open a spin-off here in May to be called Sfuzzi.

The West Side restaurant will feature a Mediterranean menu jointly developed by Richard Chamberlain, San Simeon's executive chef, and Stephen Goebel, executive chef of the Sfuzzi prototype in Dallas. Prices will be moderate, according to San Simeon's operator, Crillon Management Group.

That concern consists of Brian Galligan, who will oversee the New York Sfuzzi; Patrick Colombo; Robert Colombo; and David Palmer. The group indicated that it is already planning to open a third Sfuzzi in an undisclosed location.

Cracker Barrel opens bakeries in two units

LEBANON, Tenn. — Cracker Barrel, the 55-unit coffee-shop-and-gift-store chain, has opened bakeries in two units in an attempt to bolster take-out and on-premises dessert sales.

As part of that effort, the chain is also testing superpremium ice cream. The frozen treat is sold in both the restaurant and gift-shop components of test units.

"The jury is still out [on the bakeries] and will be out for some time," commented Cracker Barrel president Dan Evins.

Bistro in, blackened fish out at DuVall's Ritz Cafe

LOS ANGELES — West Coast restaurateur Sam DuVall, while proclaiming the passing of the Cajun-Creole trend, has begun a menu and decor metamorphosis at the Ritz Cafe, his high-grossing New Orleans-style restaurant here.

DuVall has hired Brian Whitmer, the former head chef of Le Montrachet in New York, to help shift the Ritz toward an "American bistro" format.

Carl's Jr. chain inks Japanese license pact

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Carl Karcher Enterprises has sold the Japanese development rights for its Carl's Jr. hamburger chain to Friendly Corp. of Japan, which operates 90 American-style coffee shops in the Osaka region.

Friendly paid CKE $500,000 for the rights and agreed to pay the 444-unit California company an initial 1.5-percent-of-sales royalty. Encouraged by rapid growth in Japan's fast-food market, the Osaka-based firm has set a corporate goal of opening 50 Carl's Jr. outlets within five years.

Under the 25-year exclusive agreement, Friendly would open a minimum of 30 Carl's Jr. units in the Osaka region by 1993. The company plans to have one or two outlets open by the end of this year and a total of five operating by early 1989.

FOCUS | VIEWPOINT

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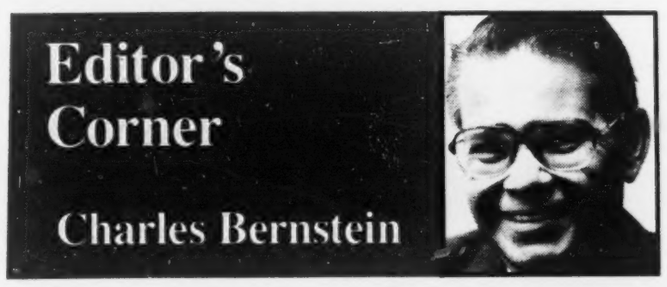
Operators' sanitation responsibilities

The widespread health inspection shakedown scandal in New York City focuses attention on a serious problem that has afflicted restaurants in major cities.

For years we thought that too many restaurants were lax about sanitation conditions and that health inspectors were the heroes of the day in zealously guarding customer rights. New York authorities actually appeared generous in giving restaurants repeated warnings to clean up unsanitary conditions.



The inspection policies seldom caused a restaurant to close for very long. Sooner or later, it apparently rectified the problem and was cleared for reopening or taken off the warning list.

For restaurateurs the cause of terror was not so much that health inspectors seemed to swoop down suddenly out of nowhere and inevitably find a few flies, mouse droppings, even a slight defect in an awning, or some kind of presumed violation. It was that the daily newspapers would print all lists released weekly by the city Health Department, naming each offending restaurant and the warning or penalty.

The resultant bad publicity was anathema to restaurateurs throughout the city, who pleaded that the dailies not print such lists unless they were flagrant violations or closings and that the newspapers allow the alleged unsanitary conditions to be remedied without public exposure.

Just as restaurateurs feared that a negative restaurant review could cause a precipitous falloff in customers or even put a place out of business, they were more afraid that any mention of even a minor sanitation code violation could ruin an operation. While we seriously doubt that a "bad" restaurant review alone destroyed very many restaurants, the alleged sanitation violations were viewed as health hazards and put places out of business, threatening livelihoods.

Predictably, the vulnerable operators were the little guys . . . neighborhood coffee shops and snack places struggling so hard for survival that they couldn't afford the loss of even a few customers, much less hundreds.

These were the places literally driven out of business by health inspections and the resultant publicity. Larger restaurants could remedy the "infractions" speedily and were not as affected by these periodic crackdowns.

At such times most of us cheered the health inspectors as heroes preserving the public welfare and maintaining the highest standards of cleanliness in America's restaurants. We also felt that publishing the names was a public service and part of the public's right to know.

With the current scandal—a total surprise to most observers but not to restaurateurs who have been harassed with such shakedowns for years—a different picture emerges. The "heroic" health inspectors of New York City are seen as villains, and the daily newspapers no longer want to print health code violation lists until the entire inspection system is overhauled.

After a two-year undercover probe of restaurateurs' allegations about forced payoffs, the FBI last month arrested 22 New York City health inspectors or supervisors and six former ones on extortion charges. The 22 were immediately suspended pending the outcome of the charges, and the entire inspection program was temporarily halted.

Those arrested were charged under federal statute with violating the Hobbs Act, which bars public employees from payments "in the official conduct of their duties." So far as is known, no charges were filed against any of the other 88 current Health Department inspectors and supervisors.

Salaries range from $23,213 for public health sanitarians to $32,735 for supervisors. The shakedowns, in which inspectors were alleged to have threatened shutdowns or the filing (and publication) of sanitation code violations, were said to involve bribes ranging from $50 to $1,400 each time and to have at least doubled the annual income of some of the inspectors.

About 300 of the city's 15,000 eating establishments were alleged to have made payoffs over the past several years. Under the existing rules, all restaurants must be inspected at least once a year. But an additional clause requiring a restaurant inspection whenever anyone complains about an alleged sanitation violation could lead to abuse by discontented former employees or anyone wanting to be a pest.

A complete overhaul of the inspection system is imperative. Some preliminary steps have already been taken, and city health inspectors are now required to wear identifying blue coats as the program is resumed on a limited basis. This assures the restaurateur that the health inspector is not an impostor.

It has been suggested that some menu prices in New York City were raised slightly to help pay the bribes. That theory, though farfetched, is indicative of the public's thinking on the subject.

Perhaps the whole scenario simply reaffirms that avarice is an incontestable ingredient of human nature. Certainly, the arrested New York City health inspectors are considered the bad guys in this case. But the fact that serious flaws and shakedowns have been uncovered in the New York health inspection system and also could exist in other cities does not relieve restaurant operators of their own responsibilities.

The need for full-scale pest control and complete sanitation programs in all food-service operations is fundamental to this industry. And any payments of bribes to prevent health inspectors from filing health code violation charges—whether actual violations or "imaginary" ones—are blatantly wrong.

Admittedly, restaurateurs are subjected to a huge amount of pressure in these situations. But the only legitimate answers are eternal sanitation vigilance and uncompromising ethics.

LETTERS

Top-quality accountants don't always have licenses

Editor, NRN:

I noted in the Feb. 15 issue of Nation's Restaurant News, in a letter to the editor, that Philip L. Wiggle, CPA, is sticking to his fetish that "quality accountants are the ones with licenses."

If that were the case, I wonder why malpractice and malfeasance lawsuits are brought against licensed professionals. In other words, I doubt if a "license" is a guarantee of infallibility.

I also believe that restaurant owners are entitled to the best accounting, tax, and management counseling available.

Common sense and my 13 years in the restaurant field make me urge restaurateurs seeking qualified accounting help to (1) determine the accountant's years of experience and expertise in the restaurant field and (2) verify the accountant's restaurant references and quality of services.

I believe the above considerations are primary areas of importance. The accountant may well be "licensed," or he may not be. I guess this is my "biased opinion." But I do not plan to wiggle out of it.

—Larry D. Roesler
restaurant consultant
Certified Internal Auditor
Chicago

Research finds no link between MSG, sickness

Editor, NRN:

The New York Metro Report column in the Feb. 1 issue of Nation's Restaurant News implies that MSG may produce Chinese Restaurant Syndrome. You may be interested in the most definitive research to date regarding MSG and alleged sensitivity.

Dr. Richard Kenney, of George Washington University Medical School, has been studying possible intolerance to glutamates for the past 17 years. His research is designed to challenge the self-identified MSG-responder in a double-blind fashion. Kenney, in a paper published last year in the peer-reviewed journal Food and Chemical Toxicology, concluded that the MSG link to Chinese Restaurant Syndrome (so named because MSG is commonly used in Chinese cuisine) is not supportable and that the symptoms associated with it (typically burning, tightness, or numbness in the chest, neck, or face) were not evident in his research. Moreover, his research fails to confirm a cause-and-effect relationship between MSG and more specific symptoms (for example, headaches and nausea), reported by those tested.

Many people (nearly half of the American population) experience after-eating discomfort following ingestion of many common foods and food ingredients.

—John D. Buchholz
staff associate
The Glutamate Association
Atlanta

More letters on page F9

Burger King ads fall short

(Continued from page 1)

Burger King executives were hopeful the new campaign returning focus on flame broiling would do that.

They maintain, however, that it is still too early to accurately reflect success or failure of the campaign.

In the Nation's Restaurant News poll, SRI Research Center Inc. here asked a representative sample of 1,000 consumers across the country, "Of all the fast-food advertising that you have read, seen, or heard in the last month, which advertising first comes to mind?"

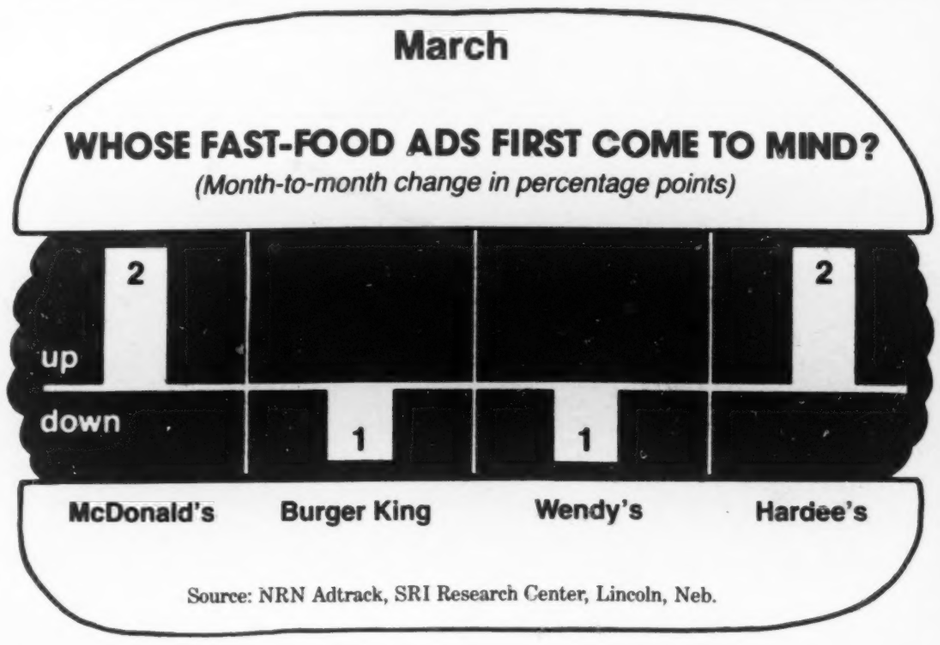
In that unaided recall survey in March, 12 percent mentioned Burger King, as opposed to 13 percent the month before.

In fact, the recall score was Burger King's lowest since last September.

For example, some 16 percent remembered Burger King's advertising in October, 14 percent in December, and 13 percent in every other month since. During that time J. Walter Thompson's "Best Food for Fast Times" spots were still running.

McDonald's, whose advertising expenditures are double those of Burger King, continued its commanding recall lead in March, with a 45-percent score, up two points from the prior-month figure.

Wendy's International dropped a percentage point from its February results, when it had scored an impressive three-percentage-point leap after its new "Hamburger A" ads debuted on television. Wendy's recall rate in March was 8 percent.



Hudson's Grill stays flexible

(Continued from page 1)

president for parent company International Eateries.

And because Hudson's Grill units avoid full-throttle '50s-theme saturation, Beckham and his associates believe the restaurants are prepared for the day when vintage-auto artifacts, neon signs, and jukeboxes again fade from commercial viability.

"The whole '50s thing may eventually wear thin, and that's something you have to think about when you're signing 15- and 20-year leases," Beckham explained.

Thematic moderation, said Ron Brett, Hudson's expansion director, "keeps us contemporary and flexible enough to move into some future trend, whatever that might be. We're not locked into vinyl booths."

For the time being, however, the Hudson's Grill concept is driving International Eateries to its impressive sales gains. The Ventura-based company, with six company-owned Hudson's and five other pub-restaurant concepts (mostly in the Santa Barbara area), posted sales in excess of $10 million last year. That figure was up from $7.8 million the year before.

The Hudson's Grill chain is scoring annual per-store averages of $1.3 million, with 25 percent of sales in alcoholic beverages, Beckham reported. The restaurants, which range in size from only 2,500 square feet to a modest 4,500 square feet, typically cost around $500,000 to open. They seat from 120 to 170 diners and have full-bar lounges that can accommodate another 30 to 50 patrons.

Hired two years ago by International Eateries founder and owner Travis Bryant, Beckham was charged with streamlining and expanding the young Hudson's chain. The concept's format, then halfway between that of a diner and a pay-the-cashier coffee shop, was changed to a classic "limited menu, full-service, casual" niche that Beckham says boils down to "burgers and booze, basically."

Food delivery was accelerated through the modification of kitchen layouts and equipment and through more intensive training of servers. "We have a 12-minute turnaround target, from order to service, but we usually hit 10 [minutes] or less," Beckham remarked.

To enhance consumers' value perceptions, Beckham has limited menu price inflation to about 3.5 percent in the last year and a half.

The Hudson's Grill menu, which Beckham pared down radically from the prototype restaurant's initial grab bag array of offerings, currently generates an average per-person tab of $6.25.

Ten burger varieties, weighing a third of a pound, priced from $2.95 to $4.95, and served with curly fries, form the core of the menu. Also offered are six appetizers, two soups, four salads, and two sandwiches, none of which is priced higher than $4.95. "We believe in simplicity," said Beckham, a veteran of Burger King Corp. and Red Robin International.

To enhance consumers' value perceptions, Beckham has limited price inflation to about 3.5 percent in the last year and a half.

Beef or chicken soft tacos ($4.50) and fajitas ($6.95; $11.95 for two diners) are the ethnic options. Along with shakes, malts, and a root beer float, the sweets on Beckham's limited menu are a mud pie, a deep-dish apple pie, and a hot fudge sundae.

Seven specialty cocktails (2.75 to $3.50) are merchandised on one flap of the tri-fold menu.

The first Hudson's Grill unit opened in Ventura in December 1984, followed in 1985 by two others, in San Luis Obispo and Oxnard. Under Beckham, the chain has added branches in Irvine, Simi Valley, and Costa Mesa. A sole franchised outlet opened in El Paso, Texas, two years ago.

Company-owned expansion, financed principally through cash flow, is International Eateries' preferred growth mode. The latest Hudson's branch, a new 215-seat prototype under construction in Santa Maria, Calif., is due to open by June. Other California sites under investigation include Mission Viejo, Pasadena, and Yorba Linda.

Doherty new NRN publisher

(Continued from page 1)

am happy to be part of NRN."

A graduate of Denver University's Hotel & Restaurant Administration program, Doherty joined General Mills at its Minneapolis headquarters in 1962 as an assistant to the national sales manager. That position evolved into the new post of sales and marketing food-service consultant.

He subsequently moved up to marketing manager in 1966 and corporate venture manager in 1968, where he assisted in General Mills' 1969 acquisition of the seven-unit Red Lobster chain.

As marketing and development vice president from 1972 to 1976, Doherty helped lead a rapid expansion of Orlando, Fla.-based Red Lobster to the top-volume seafood dinner house chain under Joe Lee's leadership.

Doherty then became president and chief executive of Santa Monica, Calif.-based A & W fast-food restaurants (owned by United Brands) from 1976 to 1979. He strengthened the chain and was instrumental in its 1979 sale to shopping center magnate Alfred Taubman.

For the next six years, Doherty was president and chief executive of Pasadena, Calif.-based Acapulco Restaurants, the Mexican dinner house chain founded by chef Raymond Marshall. Under Doherty's leadership, sales jumped from $8 million to $40 million as the chain expanded from its California base.

In 1985 Restaurant Associates president Max Pine led RA's two-stage acquisition of Acapulco. Doherty remained during the transition and then formed the Doherty Group, specializing in venture capital and company start-ups.

Doherty, 48, is an intensely competitive executive with a flair for setting objectives and "getting the job done, whatever it takes," a former employer said.

Doherty has been a board member of Corporate Care Systems, the Dodsworth Corp., and General Pacific Communications as well as a partner in the Los Angeles Original Pantry restaurants, RDR Development Co., Leuen Inc., and Film Street Ltd.

A budding author who has written two novels, he also is active in community programs, serving as board president of the Children's Institute International and a director of the U.S. Academic Decathlon.

Doherty was an Eagle Scout as a teen-ager and later won the American Citizenship and Jaycee of the Month awards.

The new NRN publisher and his wife, Mary Ellen, will be moving to New York City, NRN's headquarters. They have resided in Palos Verdes, south of Los Angeles, for several years. Two daughters and a son are in their 20s.

Hildebrand begins revolution

(Continued from page 3)

took the message to heart.

Still it was an eight-month ordeal finding the Atlanta location: an upscale courtyard shopping strip along Peachtree Road between the midtown and Buckhead districts, near the affluent in-town neighborhoods where his Hilton Head customers lived.

"When the sign ['opening in Atlanta'] finally appeared in our Hilton Head restaurant window, the customers couldn't wait to find out what part of town we were moving to," added Hildebrand, who was operations director for an eight-unit group of the Columbus, Ohio-based dinner house rib chain, Damon's.

Hildebrand knows location did help Cafe de la Place catch on. But his menu, price, and casual ambience played key roles as well. Loyal followers found the 20-item Atlanta menu nearly unchanged from that of Hilton Head except for an added veal filet and a discontinued shrimp cocktail.

"Most traditional French restaurants are high end," said Hildebrand, pointing to his parking lot, stacked with Cadillacs and BMWs. "We're serving the same French food but at half the price." He paused and then pointed again. "People own cars like that because they know value," he said.

Lamb shanks are $12.50; rabbit marinated in Burgundy with herbs is $12.95; duck, semiboned with bing cherry sauce, is $13.95. Pan-sautéed Oysters Helena, served on a warm horseradish cream sauce, and Shrimp Crevette Provençale are the lead appetizers. Half the entrées are seafood.

Another delight Hildebrand's customers found was the exhibition kitchen. "A true kitchen," he challenged, "not some glass-enclosed, walled-off thing." General manager Davies said the staff encourages diners to leave their tables and talk across the counter with the chefs.

Hildebrand said new customers phoning for reservations always ask about the dress code. "We tell them shirts and shoes are required, but trousers are optional," he joked, admitting he sees "all kinds of dress" yet insisting "it's better when nobody's uncomfortable."

Hildebrand may add another small (36 seat) dining room, allowing his kitchen to reach its 200-meal potential. Cafe de la Place now serves 150 dinners on three turns—sending away another 50 to 100 customers—on Fridays and Saturdays.

The restaurant, which Hildebrand believes could be cloned successfully in any Atlanta suburb, is projected to reach $1 million this year. "I've got ideas for four or five more restaurants here," he said.

Cafe de la Place

Menu Sampler

Crevette Sautée Provençale	$5.95
Pâté de Canard	$4.95
Veau Française	$13.95
Civet de Lapin	$12.95
Crêpes aux Fruit de Mer	$10.95
Cappuccino	$2.50